

## **Summary**

### **Meeting of the Las Californias Work Group Biodiversity Along the Border Committee**

February 27, 2007

#### **Regional Water Quality Control Board San Diego**

##### **Participants**

The following committee members participated in the Las Californias work group:

Kathy Viatella – TNC (Co-chair)

Miguel Vargas – Pronatura Noroeste (Co-chair)

Janaye Byergo - Bureau of Land Management

Mike Chapel – US Forest Service

Crystal Crawford – SANDAG

Christina Villeda Facio – SEMARNAT

Roman Fernandez – Consulado de México en San Diego

Todd Ferrara – California Resources Agency

Keith Greer – SANDAG

Gonzalo De Leon Giron – ANP Parque Constitución de 1857, Baja California

Mary Cruz Granillo - SEFOA

Luana Kiger - NRCS

Mike Mulligan – CA Dept. Fish and Game

Tom Oberbauer – County of San Diego

Gloria Silva- US Forest Service

Daniel Sosa - CNA

Jerre Stallcup – Conservation Biology Institute

James Thiede – US Consulate in Tijuana

Greg Thomsen – Bureau of Land Management

Ramón Tadeo Real Valdez – SEFOA, B.C.

##### **Meeting Highlights**

Kathy Viatella and Miguel Vargas opened the meeting by reminding everyone that the purpose for this project is to determine if the California Biodiversity Council might provide some short-term assistance with trans-border conservation planning. The foundation for the discussions is the Las Californias Binational Conservation Initiative. Jerre Stallcup then provided a summary of the January 30 meeting on this subject (see notes from this meeting for the details of Jerre's remarks). Kathy then explained that the purposes for this meeting are to review the action items from the previous meeting and to seek advice from the group on the next steps for completing the project.

Before the action items were reviewed, participants made the following observations and remarks:

- Christina Villeda Facio noted that biodiversity along the border is being discussed in several other forums and she questioned why it was being discussed again here. Crystal Crawford and Mike Chapel explained that the Biodiversity Council does not want to duplicate any other ongoing work. But it is interested in seeing if there is something that can be done to complement current work along the border.
- Tom Oberbauer provided an overview of the ongoing habitat conservation planning in San Diego County. This multi-agency program includes federal and state lands administered by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Forest Service, and California State Parks, but has considerable contributions from private lands as well. It would be helpful to coordinate any conservation planning in Mexico with the current work in California.
- Miguel Vargas offered a summary of the work by Pronatura, The Nature Conservancy, and Conservation Biology Institute along the border. These groups have joined forces to produce the Las Californias report which is forming a foundation for conservation planning in the region. He explained that the private lands administered by Rancho La Puerta near Tecate, Mexico are now being conserved through a conservation easement held by Pronatura. This approach is desired for other important private land along the border.
- Gonzalo De Leon Giron observed that more protected land is needed along the border. He reported on the work they were doing inside Parque Constitución including reforestation and managing Laguna Hanson for waterfowl. He asked if land-management agencies in California would be willing to help his national park staff with training on current conservation practices. Note: Jerre Stallcup will arrange for assistance through Rick Rayburn at the California Dept. of Parks and Recreation. The US Forest Service and U.S. Bureau of Land Management are also willing to help if needed.

The participants then discussed their progress on the action items that were identified at the previous meeting. Some of the key findings were:

- Greg Thomsen reported that the U.S. Bureau of Land Management is currently updating their resource management plans and they are agreeable to discussing cooperative conservation with others along the border. Greg also suggested that this group may wish to consider forming a cross-border partnership to work on conservation issues. He offered the Border Area Fire Council as a successful model that has been coordinating fire protection on both sides of the border for ten years.
- Mike Mulligan stated that the California Department of Fish and Game is willing to consider cooperative conservation work along the border with other interested agencies. The Department is willing to engage the Wildlife Conservation Board, the state agency that manages conservation funds about potential purchases or easements of key private parcels. Mike requested a more detailed briefing on the Las Californias report. Kathy Viatella and Jerre Stallcup will provide the briefing for Mike and his staff.
- Ramon Valdes explained that SEFOA is involved in soil and water conservation programs in the region. They are also interested in biodiversity conservation, but they are challenged by the many small absentee land owners in important conservation areas. He

also mentioned how San Pedro Mártir National Park is now managed by the state and they are working with local ranchers to exclude livestock from the park. They are willing to assist within the limits of their scarce resources and limited authority.

- Todd Ferrara explained that it is possible to secure technical assistance and funding from California for this project. However, he cautioned that staff and money are limited and there is significant competition in California for these resources.
- Greg Thomsen reported that he understands that the FWS is investigating the possibility of using mitigation funds for impacts that occur in California (or elsewhere) throughout the species range, which might include Mexico, but the agency would still need to secure a guarantee of long-term protection.
- Gloria Silva stated that the U.S. Forest Service has very limited funds, but does have some staff that can be available to assist with this project. Technical assistance may also be available from the U.S. Forest Service International Forestry Program. Gloria will seek more information on this program.
- Keith Greer reported that the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) is also involved in several conservation planning projects along the border. They are willing to assist with this project and support the formation of a cross-border committee to work on conservation issues.
- Miguel Vargas explained that state and federal funds from the US have been used in Mexico and he expects continued support for important projects.

Tom Oberbauer then asked how conservation is done in Mexico. Christina Villeda Facio explained that SEMARNAT develops national policies that are coordinated with the states and local governments. Most local governments do not have strong authority over conservation (or funds) so NGOs are often the drivers of conservation projects. Miguel observed that coordination of conservation among the federal, state, and local governments is time-consuming and challenging. He suggested that work by IMPLAN in Tijuana is a good model for success.

Kathy Viatella summarized the key remarks from participants. Mike Chapel then observed that the local, state, and federal government agencies in California all reported that they can commit staff or financial resources to additional biodiversity conservation planning along the border. He also observed that it is not yet clear that the offer for conservation planning is important to local, state and federal agencies in Mexico. Mike suggested that, to be competitive for the limited staff and funds from the US, it will be important to quickly clarify the value of this work to the people of Mexico. Christina Villeda Facio volunteered to convene agencies in Mexico to compare their programs and determine if this project would be a priority for them. The results of this discussion will be the focus of the next meeting on March 27.

Following the work group meeting, Kathy Viatella and Miguel Vargas reported the highlights to the full committee. In the full committee the dates for future meetings were tentatively set to the fourth Tuesday of every month. And, it was agreed we would try to find a meeting location closer to the border or in Mexico.